



Soedjatmoko and Ratmini with their daughters Kamala and Isna  
June 1963  
(a third daughter, Galuh, was born two years later)

# IN MEMORIAM: SOEDJATMOKO, 1922–1989

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## 1922-1966

With the death of Soedjatmoko from heart failure on December 21, 1989, Indonesia lost one of her foremost intellectuals, indeed a man who had occupied that position for well over three decades. He formed something of a bridge between Javanese and Western culture, for he had deep roots in both, with an unusual capacity to help Indonesians and Western intellectuals understand each other. He was an outstanding political and social analyst, influential writer and publisher, a keen observer and practitioner of Indonesian foreign policy, and did much to advance the study of Indonesia's history by his countrymen.

Of the major factors that shaped his character, there are several that have seemed especially salient: his own reflective Javanese mysticism; his wide reading of Western history and political philosophy; and his strong intuitive nationalism. Also significant were his principal political mentor Sutan Sjahrir—who greatly influenced his critical political faculties and his brand of democratic socialism ; and his wife Ratmini (whom he married in 1957) who enhanced his humanitarian perspective, gave him a strong emotional anchor, and enabled him sometimes to laugh at himself.

Eldest son of a Javanese physician from Madiun, Saleh Mangoendiningrat, who worked in the Netherlands East Indies medical service, and a Javanese mother from Ponorogo, Soedjatmoko Mangoendiningrat was born on January 10, 1922 in Sawahlunto, West Sumatra, where his father was then stationed. (When I first met Soedjatmoko in 1947 he still used this full name and had it engraved on his calling card, but within a few years he dropped the Mangoendiningrat, for he found the aristocratic tenor of "ningrat" distasteful and discordant with the ethos of revolution. From then on, he stuck with just the single name, Soedjatmoko, encouraging his acquaintances to contract that to simply "Koko.")

When he was two years old he and the rest of the family followed their father, who had received a five-year fellowship for further medical study, to the Netherlands. This early immersion in a Dutch setting helped insure that he was soon able to speak that

language without trace of alien accent. He could follow the Dutch language educational stream all the way through secondary school, ultimately graduating from the Surabaya HBS in 1940. He then entered the medical school in Jakarta. His study there continued into the Japanese occupation, when in 1943 he and eight others were expelled ostensibly for their refusal to follow Japanese orders to shave their heads, but actually because the Kenpeitei were concerned about their contacts with non-cooperating Indonesian political leaders, especially Sutan Sjahrir. The Japanese may well also have learned of the visit to Sukarno shortly before this by Soedjatmoko and his two close friends, Subadio and Sudarpo, during which they scolded that rather startled but friendly nationalist leader for being slow in appreciating the implications of Japan's growing losses to US naval power.

After his expulsion from medical school Soedjatmoko returned to his family's home in Surakarta, where his father had for many years served as court physician to the Sunan. There he avidly read as much Western history and political literature as he could find. As a consequence, his interest in socialism was kindled and it was natural that at the beginning of the revolution he was attracted to Amir Sjarifuddin and Sutan Sjahrir. It was while working at Amir Sjarifuddin's newly formed Ministry of Information in 1946 that Koko, together with Sudarpo and Sanjoto, responded to Prime Minister Sjahrir's request that in what was still British-occupied Jakarta they establish a Dutch language weekly, *Het Inzicht* (Insight) to counter the Dutch-sponsored *Het Uitzicht* (Outlook). This introduction to journalism had a lasting effect, and the next year Koko and two other friends launched on borrowed capital what was to become one of the most influential socialist-oriented journals, *Siasat* (Tactics).

His journalistic career was interrupted, but not ended, when Prime Minister Sjahrir in 1947 asked Soedjatmoko to go to New York as a member of the Republic's "observer" status delegation to the United Nations. He remained there until 1950, then spent most of a year at Harvard's Littauer Center before he moved to Washington in 1951 to serve as a political counsellor in the Republic's recently established Washington Embassy. Appalled by McCarthyism and disillusioned by the post-revolutionary governments in Indonesia, in late 1951 he left government service and set out on a nine-month trip through Western and Eastern Europe seeking political inspiration and securer political bearings. He was keenly disappointed in both the West European democracies and the Communist states of Europe, quickly perceiving the striking disparities between ideologies and performance in all of them. Only in Yugoslavia, especially in talks with Milovan Djilas, did he encounter insights that seemed to have relevance for Indonesia. Otherwise he returned to Indonesia without the answers he had sought.

Soedjatmoko now plunged back into journalism and publishing, serving again as editor of *Siasat*, helping found the Socialist Party daily *Pedoman* in 1952, and then the cultural, political journal *Konfrontasi*, as well as helping establish the Pembangunan publishing house, which he directed until 1961. He became increasingly close to Sjahrir, whose Indonesian Socialist Party he joined in 1955, running successfully for it in the 1956 elections for the Constituent Assembly, where he represented the party until the Assembly's demise in 1959. Though becoming increasingly critical of Sukarno, he maintained warm, even though often strained relations with him, Sukarno continuing to regard him with a sort of avuncular affection.

Reflecting his ongoing interest in Indonesian foreign policy and international affairs in general, Soedjatmoko in 1955 served with the Indonesian delegation at the Bandung Conference and later that year helped establish the Indonesian Institute of World

Affairs, serving as its Secretary General for the next four years. He gave remarkably forthright addresses to Indonesia's Foreign Service Academy in 1953 and 1957, both of which introduced much needed fresh perspectives. Subsequently he was outraged at the United States' covert intervention in 1957–1958 in support of the Sumatra and Sulawesi-based PRRI/Permesta rebellions. This he saw as indirectly leading on January 16, 1962, to Sukarno's jailing of Sjahrir, as well as several other Socialist Party members, and four years later to Sjahrir's death from inadequate medical care. Although Sjahrir had no involvement in the rebellions, Soedjatmoko recognized why Sukarno might have thought so. For one of the party's top leaders, Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, was deeply involved from the very outset, and was the rebellious colonels' major contact with US intelligence agents. (Crystallization of Sukarno's erroneous conviction that Sjahrir was heading a conspiracy to oust him was clearly enhanced by his belief that the Socialist Party's most prominent leader in East Indonesia, Anak Agung Gde Agung, was behind a nearly successful assassination attempt against him in Makassar on January 7, 1962.)

These latter events happened while Soedjatmoko was spending a term at Cornell (August 1961–January 1962) as a Visiting Lecturer in History, conducting the Southeast Asia Program's graduate seminar on Indonesia. Though still intensely loyal to Sjahrir as a friend and still much drawn to his former mentor's variant of democratic socialism and sharing his fear that greater power to the military would lead to "neo-fascism," Soedjatmoko had by this time established intellectual perspectives that were very much his own. The first major milestone in this process was, I believe, his courageous and at the time somewhat iconoclastic address before some 800 teachers and writers at the National History Seminar at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta in December 1957.<sup>1</sup> This controversial statement caused a considerable stir at the conference and generated ripples and eddies that had a clearly salubrious effect on an as-yet poorly nourished field that was still largely reliant on earlier Dutch scholarship. He argued that before an "Indonesian history of Indonesia" could be written a great deal of fresh research would have to be carried out. He feared an overly nationalistic reaction to the existing often Europe-centric body of Indonesian history, and felt a call to keep that history as free as possible from those who, in compensation or to serve immediate political ends, expediently sought to subordinate history to national myths and propaganda. "I thought," he wrote me soon after the conference, "that I should concentrate on trying to protect the study of history from the impatient demands of nationalism." There would have to be great vigilance, he said, against "the danger that the need for a new national myth and the need for a more or less uniform way of looking at our past would induce, or seduce, people to adopt one particular viewpoint as the official version of Indonesian history, denying the legitimacy of others." That perception was in later years to haunt him and was, I think, the basis of the ongoing internalized intellectual tension that led him to his decision to eschew any independent analysis of the traumatic events of 1965–1966 and helped move his exercises in political analysis away from Indonesia as such to the more generic socio-economic and political problems of the Third World as a whole.

But in the late 1950s and first half of the 1960s it was the insights reflected in his widely read and influential address at the Yogyakarta Conference that constituted the first major step in Soedjatmoko's making what I believe was his greatest contribution—the encouragement of an initially largely ahistorical younger generation into the study of its country's history and to undertake the fresh research necessary to provide its foun-

<sup>1</sup>In slightly revised and expanded form an English translation of this was published in 1960 under the title *An Approach to Indonesia's History: Towards an Open Future* by Cornell's Modern Indonesia Project.

dations. This was an ongoing contribution which has had an enduring impact. To prepare Indonesians for this effort he felt that they needed first to know as much as possible about the range and quality of existing historical sources. Initially, it was essential, he believed, to make available a solid introduction to Indonesian historiography incorporating the best that had so far been written on sources and methodology by the most outstanding Indonesian and Western scholars. Except perhaps for Ratmini, I doubt that any Indonesian realized how much time, effort, and patience went into this undertaking. For among the twenty-one distinguished contributors to the substantial volume Soedjatmoko edited, there was a dauntingly high number of *prima donnas*. But after three years this outstanding compilation, with his excellent introduction and conclusion, was published in 1965 by Cornell University Press under the title of *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*. Its considerable impact was not limited to Indonesian historians and aspirant historians, but to those in Europe, Japan, and the United States as well. Twenty-five years have gone by and this volume still stands unequaled, a classic in the field.

While history and historiography had become dominant among Soedjatmoko's intellectual concerns, his interest in current international relations and Indonesia's foreign policy remained prominent. He was a sharp critic of American and Soviet foreign policies, though little of this is recorded in his published writings. He was strongly opposed to US involvement in Indochina, and at Cornell, in 1961, gave a brilliant public lecture severely critical of American policy towards the Third World. Though he was urged to publish this, he declined to do so (insisting over the next few years that it would first have to be brought up to date). If that address had been printed, it is possible, I believe, that in 1968 the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, might have voiced reservations about accepting Soedjatmoko as Indonesia's Ambassador to Washington.

Soedjatmoko never could quite sort out his feelings towards Sukarno. He was impatient with him and often intensely critical of his shortcomings. He understood the President's felt need to balance off the army and the Communist Party against each other in order to stay at the top of the pyramid of power himself—and he preferred Sukarno at the apex of this pyramid to either of the others. But he worried that, as the army's power grew, the Communist Party would increase its influence with the President. Briefly his hopes were buoyed at the end of July 1964 when Sukarno informed him that he would like him to come to the palace for a talk and at almost the same time appointed the Sultan of Yogyakarta as a member of his cabinet in the potentially powerful position of Coordinating Minister. On August 2, Soedjatmoko wrote me: "I for one believe that this appointment signifies the beginning of the President's attempt to loosen his ties with the PKI and to shift his international relations away from China. This, in my view, is bound to lead to increased friction with the PKI and will in turn even further precipitate a change in his foreign policy, leading most likely to an orientation in the direction of Europe (West and East) rather than to the United States."

Developments did not follow his expectations. Political polarization increased: the army's power grew; and the Communist Party assertiveness and outspokenness became greater and Sukarno appeared to lean on it for support more than before. Like most Indonesians Soedjatmoko was quite unprepared for the violent series of events that began at the end of September 1965 and he was stunned by the brutal actions that ensued.

His disorientation and uncertainty as to what course he should take were evident in a letter he wrote me on November 6, 1965. Taking off from what I'd told him as to my

own frustration in trying to work effectively against American intervention in Vietnam, he went on to reflect on his own uncertain situation:

It is of course important continually to realize how much one can do and how much one can not do in activities of this kind. One takes a position and acts upon it as well as possible. But there are situations in which these activities will not change the course of history much. It is only if and when the main stream of history of one's country shifts its course so as to bring it closer in line with the position one has taken, that one can feel vindicated.

It is therefore important for one's equanimity and the preservation of one's creative energies to determine at any point to what extent it is possible and worth[while] to buck the main stream, and to know whether and to what extent the main stream could be deflected by one's efforts at that particular point of time. And this should determine how much energy to put in this particular fight at this particular time. For certainly, there will be other battles to fight, and some undoubtedly at more auspicious times. (In the history of a nation, I think, certain lessons just have to be learned from bitter experience). In this way you will be able better to guard yourself against paralyzing frustrations and to preserve yourself for the times when history will open up new options.

Some time later he sent me a note advising me that it would be better for him if I refrained from writing until he advised me it was safe to do so. It was on April 10, 1966 from Zurich I next heard from him. Sukarno had belatedly agreed to send Sjahrir to Switzerland for specialized medical treatment. But that came too late, for Sjahrir was dying. Soedjatmoko had gone to Zurich together with Poppy, Sjahrir's wife, to bring the body back to Jakarta where Sukarno had ordered that Sjahrir was to be given a state funeral and buried in the national cemetery at Kalibata—which signified, in Soedjatmoko's words, "a complete and public exoneration." Koko wrote:

It is a dreadful loss. And his life and the way of his sickness and death very vividly bring home to me the tragic aspect of life, and especially of man in politics. He was really a great man, and so were the dimensions of his life great, in its brief glory as well as in its sufferings. And in a very real sense I realize that his failure in politics really signified his greatness as a man and a human being. It is not only an irony of life that his death now at this stage of history dramatizes the values that he has tried to uphold, even at the cost of continued political power.

I am proud to have been his pupil, his friend and his comrade in arms. And my spiritual and intellectual indebtedness to him continues. In one thing I will never be able to emulate him, and that is in his courage, this complete absence of fear, as well as in the full enjoyment of life as it came to him.

Sjahrir's death and the crises of 1965–1966 in Indonesia combined to establish a turning point in Soedjatmoko's life—shifting his focus away from his country's domestic politics and journalism towards the world outside Indonesia.

George McT. Kahin

## 1966-1989

Others will cite chronologically the various roles that Soedjatmoko was to play after he became Ambassador to the United States in 1968. From that time throughout his tenure as rector of United Nations University, his world view was a continually broadening one. In 1960, when I was working with his friends Governor Budiono, Selosoemardjan, Kampto Utomo (now Sajogyo), and others on the feasibility of a national community development program in Indonesia, he and I talked about the forms it might take, the variations in content that would have to be made because of the country's cultural diversity, and the sensitivity its personnel would need to have in working with a rural population.

When he chaired a meeting in Sulawesi in late 1974 to review the proposed rural development program for Repelita Dua, the second Five-Year Development Plan, he still held his concerns for the possible abrasion or erosion of local values and ethical relationships, but stressed conditions for change, especially motivational issues for government "agents of change." In subsequent conferences on Indonesian development, whether on nutrition, on agriculture, or on broader questions of the social good, he provided an intellectual breadth not often displayed either in the technical papers or by their authors. Increasingly, he was scholar and pragmatist. Here he was not a critic; rather, as one colleague later remarked, "He set your soul on fire and revealed the intellectual power *your* ideas could have."

Soedjatmoko injected a humanizing quality into development proposals and programs when this was lacking. This is seen in his extensive list of publications on basic needs, on the social and cultural aspects of development, and on ethics and values in a changing world order.

His papers and published talks were important for some of us who lived in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. We were sometimes frustrated by a wide array of constraints—the impedimenta of bureaucratic life, uncritical efforts (on occasion of our own doing) of "technological transfer" of institutions from one country to another, and the understandable resistance of rural people to the too-frequent, capricious suggestions of professionals who would change the behavior of people other than themselves. Soedjatmoko's work—his insights—gave pause to tinkering with the lives of other people. During this period his roles on the boards of the Ford and Hazen foundations, as well as with European institutions and international commissions, gave his ideas a global scope which culminated in his appointment in 1980 as rector of United Nations University.

Soedjatmoko steadily moved the university in new directions, sharply in contrast to its earlier limited scope. He provided linkages between the institution and international rights movements. He set the stage for revitalization of the university, conceiving it as a world institute for development research exploring ecological problems, questions of the sustainability of institutional change and appropriate technology, especially in developing countries, and enabled greater breadth in the pursuit of intellectual research along more traditional disciplinary lines.

In the course of his tenure, centers of research were founded in Finland and the Netherlands. Two others under his leadership are scheduled to be established in Barcelona and Macao. In these cases as in others, he gave encouragement and advice with a buoyancy and enthusiasm for ideas generated by his faculty and staff. His delegation of authority and responsibility had a disarming, but positive effect even on those who had differing views.

Retirement from the rectorship came in 1987 after he had served two terms. It was followed by a reluctant candidacy for the director-generalship of UNESCO, where he had strong, but insufficient support from many participant governments. This reluctance came from his desire for "a quiet time when I can read and write." He had plans for two books: one on the Indonesian struggle for independence, in which he also wanted to deal with his father's influence on him; and the second on issues of governance, which, as scholar and pragmatic administrator, had caught his attention as an area for special study.

He returned to Indonesia in 1987 and was soon enmeshed in a vigorous regimen of lectures and participation in conferences and seminars. The following year, in discussing the postponement of his writing plans, he explained that "My friends feel strongly that I must maintain an active public presence. . . ." He did not elaborate.

Soedjatmoko died on December 21, 1989, while he was delivering a lecture in Yogyakarta. His daughter, Kamala, has given us a fragment that he had written a week earlier:

There is a Javanese saying  
that life is a brief stop for a sip of water  
on a longer spiritual journey.  
In this view, all of our experiences,  
the way we go through the rites of passage,  
from birth to adulthood,  
marriage and parenthood,  
to old age and death,  
all our loves and friendships,  
all our commitments,  
all our compassion,  
and the way we learn to deal with  
our failures, disappointments,  
and misfortunes,  
constitute the makings for human growth  
on this longer spiritual journey.

**Milton L. Barnett**



